



Expats Become Repats: Nigerian Diaspora Returns To Africa

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Nigeria: the "repats" who've returned



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In 2009, Achenyo Idachaba left her corporate job in the U.S. and moved to Nigeria, where she founded MitiMeth, a for-profit company that makes eco-friendly crafts from the water hyacinths choking Nigeria's waterways.

Idachaba saw opportunity in the invasive aquatic weed which hampers trade, interrupts schooling and disrupts everyday life, according to [TED.com](#).

She researched how to harvest, dry and weave water hyacinth, then went pounding on doors trying to recruit people who knew how to weave. Mithimeth makes woven boxes, textured lamps and keychains out of the plant. "I love handicrafts, especially handicrafts woven around a story," Idachaba said in a [TEDblog](#). "Looking at water hyacinth now, I see something valuable, aesthetic, durable — something beautiful."

Growing numbers of Nigerians who built lives in cities like London, New York and Paris are returning home, even though Nigeria still faces problems in infrastructure, poverty and corruption, according to [Channel24](#).

Aisha Shaba grew up in East London, returning to Nigeria four years ago, where she landed a role in the country's top soap opera, "Tinsel." She has now moved on to other film and TV roles as well as working as a presenter.

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"The salary is much more, we get better job opportunities and the lifestyle is much cheaper for me," Shaba said as she described living in Nigeria after being in the diaspora.

Expats — or repats, the preferred description for brain-gain returnees — have been encouraged by the

election of President Mohammadu Buhari, who promised to stop corruption and build a new Nigeria, Channel24 reported.

Helen Isibor-Epega is a composer and musician who moved from the U.K. to Nigeria, where she performs as the Venus Bushfires.

“During the last 25 years a lot of people who could leave, left,” she told Channel24. “It was brain drain and now we’re seeing more of a brain gain.”

“I would definitely encourage people to come back, especially those who are well-trained, highly-educated, forward-thinking and progressive,” she said.

The repats work to promote an alternate image of Lagos — an upwardly mobile population who sees massive opportunities.

Baba Jallah Epega, Helen’s husband, is chairman of Nigeria-based EMC3, a communications and events company. He returned to Nigeria from the U.K. two years ago, and he’s trying to change perceptions of doing business there.

“Our parents took us away at such an early age,” he said on a Channel24 video. “I left when I was 6. I went to lovely schools in England. I learned a lot of good things like rugby. Our parents always pushed us away from Nigeria. They said ‘Don’t go back there. It’s corrupt. There’s nothing for you there.’ And then that turned.”

Baba Epega’s clients are in Nigeria and beyond, including some looking to invest in the country. He is regularly approached by young people, age 21 to 35, who want to return, he said.

“They are often young professionals who may not yet have kids,” Baba Epega said. “Some families in U.K. are sending their kids to Nigeria after university to try and see what they can do. The more people that visit for holidays, even to visit their families and friends, the more they challenge and reject the often regressive ‘poverty porn’ images and negative stories that have been portrayed.

“As you can see there has been a big boom for the arts, for fashion, music and film. And then there are others who are setting up agri-businesses, engineering, mining companies, you name it. You can feel there’s a big rush.”

Kemdy McEarnest moved to Lagos less than a year ago and has a PR business. If lots of Nigerians can return, the country could really grow, he told Channel24.

The repats are not without their critics. Some resent them, saying they’re the lucky few, according to Channel24. There’s even some hostility towards some of them.

But the repats argue that they took some big risks in returning home, giving up careers and opportunities elsewhere.

Some of the repats say it’s skilled, educated Nigerians with vision, like them, who are in the best position to contribute towards changing the country, according to Channel24. Their success will persuade others with skills and resources to return. They see themselves as trailblazers.

Many repats resent the stereotypes of Nigeria which they say are portrayed in the international media as an impoverished country devastated by Islamist terror. They want to challenge these perceptions by starting new businesses and industries, improving the country’s infrastructure and growing the economy.

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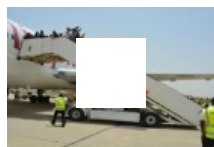
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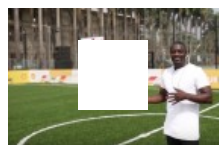
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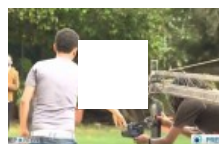
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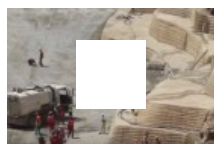
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